

Coming of Age: Teachers in Iowa, 1954 to 1993

ISSN 0003-4827

Copyright © 1994 State Historical Society of Iowa. This article is posted here for personal use, not for redistribution.

Recommended Citation

"Coming of Age: Teachers in Iowa, 1954 to 1993." *The Annals of Iowa* 53 (1994), 403-403.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.9867>

Hosted by [Iowa Research Online](#)

Coming of Age: Teachers in Iowa, 1954 to 1993, by Fred R. Comer. Des Moines: Iowa State Education Association, 1993. xii, 209 pp. Illustrations, appendixes, index. \$20.00 cloth.

REVIEWED BY CARROLL ENGELHARDT, CONCORDIA COLLEGE

Authored by the executive director of the Iowa State Education Association (ISEA), this book continues the story of Irving Hart's *Milestones*, published in 1954 to commemorate the centennial of the ISEA. Both are institutional histories written by insiders to chronicle the triumph of a professional association. On the one hand, institutional history by insiders makes a valuable historical contribution by articulating the professional self-image of teachers and their association, which is essential to understanding the history of public education in Iowa. On the other hand, institutional histories often suffer from a narrow focus and from a progressive orientation that chronicles only inevitable organizational success. Comer's book shares the strengths and weaknesses of the genre. In addition, the book's historical value is limited by an anecdotal style and a lack of scholarly apparatus.

Comer tells an important story that differs significantly from Hart's, revealing the sea change that has occurred in Iowa education since 1954. According to Comer's thesis, stated in his title, Iowa classroom teachers have "come of age" by taking control of their association from "the schoolmen" (that is, superintendents) who had dominated the organization from its inception. Gaining control of the ISEA by 1973, teachers advocated and secured passage of legislation for collective bargaining (1974), continuing contracts (1976), and an autonomous standards board (1989). They avoided a split between unionists and professionals by taking an interest in professional issues and by leading in the improvement of Iowa schools. These institutional successes were achieved by a new generation of teachers who, like the author himself, were young, well-educated, aggressive, and unwilling to be dominated any longer by school boards and superintendents.

This is an important story told only in outline. To complete the outline, we need to know more about the social context of Iowa education during these years. How did the transformation of Iowa and American society further or hinder the changing character of classroom teachers, the ISEA, and the association's professional agenda? When some industrious scholar attempts to answer these questions by linking changes in the schools and the profession to changes in society, we will have a more complete historical account than Comer's book provides.

Copyright of Annals of Iowa is the property of State of Iowa, by & through the State Historical Society of Iowa and its content may not be copied or emailed to multiple sites or posted to a listserv without the copyright holder's express written permission. However, users may print, download, or email articles for individual use.